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ABSTRACT

An ESL (English as a Second Language) program has been set up for international students at a small, two-year college for women, Immaculata College, in Washington, D.C. It has been integrated into the regular school curriculum and the courses carry academic credit. Courses emphasize specific language skills. Spoken English empasizes oral facility with attention to grammatical structure and pronunciation. Directed Discussion, for advanced students, gives further practice in oral presentations and discussions. Reading English emphasizes reading comprehension and the development of related study skills, including vocabulary and reading rate. Written English stresses syntax, idiomatic usage, and the mechanics of writing compositions. Advanced Grammar reviews English structure and gives students practice with formal writing styles. Listening with understanding is the focus of the Aural Comprehension course. Selected Problems in English is offered in the immersion program just prior to the opening of the fall semester and is designed to treat problems in various aspects of the language skills. It also serves as a kind of orientation to the American college and educational system. An attempt is made throughout to provide students with opportunities to interact with American students in order to increase their cultural awareness and understanding. (CFM)

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DEVELOPING AN ESL PROGRAM IN A SMALL TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

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Revised version of a paper presented at the ATESL Section of the 26th annual national conference of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, Albuquerque, New Mexico, May 1974.

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DEVELOPING AN ESL PROGRAM IN A SMALL TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

As many small colleges have witnessed an increase in the number of international students applying to or enrolling in their institutions during the past few years, the English language needs have become increasingly problematic. Students often have neither the money, time nor willingness to delay taking regular courses leading to their degrees. Many object to enrolling in an intensive course in English offered by large universities or language institutes. This article reports the development of both an intensive and semi-intensive ESL program within the context of a small two-year college. The program was designed to be an integral part of the curriculum, thereby making it possible for in-coming international students to enroll directly in a college program while at the same time acquiring or strengthening their English language skills. The pattern of the program does not differ significantly from that of many of the large well-established English language institutes. Its uniqueness rests essentially on the fact that such a program can be incorporated into a small institution that traditionally turned away students with inadequate proficiency in English but came to the realization that ESL can take a legitimate place as one of the distinctive disciplines in the curriculum of a small institution. Prospective international students no longer need delay beginning work on their undergraduate degrees, but rather, can incorporate ESL courses into their degree plans.

A private college for women situated in the nation's capital, Immaculata College of Washington recently experienced a dramatic shift in the student population. In 1969-70, seven percent of the students came from foreign countries. By 1973-74, almost half of the nearly 200 students were international. The students are recognized as a valuable part of the institution's resources. Indeed,

the multinational character of the college reflects a microcosmic global community. However, for the potential of such a community to be realized and for each student to be a successful contributing member, the provision for assisting students to develop English language proficiency was imperative.

Originally planned as a service program for intermediate and advanced level students needing further work in one or more of the language skills - aural comprehension, speaking, reading, writing - the program was revised to include the beginning level by the introduction of an intensive two-week immersion program immediately prior to fall semester registration. By following a full ESL program for a semester, beginning level students were then prepared to undertake limited work in other academic areas by the spring semester.

A decision made early in the development of the program was that of granting academic credit for ESL courses. Each course carries three hours of credit, up to 12 of which can apply towards the Associate in Arts degree requirements in the same manner that foreign language credits can apply towards the degree for native English-speaking students.

A Certificate of Proficiency in English is awarded to students successfully completing a minimum of twelve credit hours in ESL courses. Since these courses form part of the regular college curriculum, students are given grades which count towards cumulative averages.

In the college organizational structure, the ESL program is part of the Division of Languages, Literature, and Communication. Functioning as a separate unit within the division the program has its own director, who is responsible to the division chairman. By clearly separating the ESL program from the English department, the notion that ESL courses are a form of remedial English is eliminated .

To provide flexibility in meeting individual needs, course offerings empah-

size specific skills with the understanding, of course, that language learning cannot be discretely separated into mutually exclusive areas. The following courses are offered: Spoken English I, II; Directed Discussion; Reading English I, II; Aural Comprehension; Written English I, II; Advanced Grammar; Selected Problems in English. A brief discussion of each will give some indication of the nature and scope of the ESL program. The general orientation observed in all courses is that of a humanistic situational approach to second language acquisition.

Spoken English, taken for either one or two semesters, includes focus on oral facility with attention to grammatical structure and pronunciation. Students have extensive opportunities for oral presentations in both formal and informal styles. The use of taped materials is required. For the advanced student, Directed Discussion gives further practice in oral presentations and discussions of prepared topics along with drills on the various components of grammar.

In Reading English, also offered as a one or two semester sequence, emphasis is on reading comprehension and the development of related study skills, including vocabulary and reading rate. One or two semesters of Written English stress syntax, idiomatic usage and the mechanics of writing compositions. This and other courses are sectioned as necessary for beginning intermediate and advanced levels. Advanced Grammar, as the title implies, is designed for students who have demonstrated considerable proficiency in English but who would profit from further direct attention to the structure of the language. In addition to reviewing English structure, students have considerable practice in writing formal styles. Advanced readings and library research are used as the basis for some of the writing required in the course.

Listening, whether it be to a professor's lecture or a student discussion,

is a key skill to academic success. For those students who eventually plan to use English in some type of career experience understanding English over a range of variations is crucial. Listening with understanding is the focus of the Aural Comprehension course. Exercises in listening to a variety of styles of spoken English give further opportunity to develop understanding of the spoken language.

Selected Problems in English is designed to treat problems in various aspects of each of the language skills. It is offered in the immersion program just prior to the opening of the fall semester. Incoming freshmen whose TOEFL scores indicate need for further work in ESL are either encouraged or required to enroll in the course as an introduction to the more intensive work that will follow in the fall semester. Timed before the opening of the academic year, it also serves as a kind of orientation to the college and educational system of the United States.

Although a language laboratory facility is not available to the ESL program, taped materials, along with cassette players are circulated through the library for use in an area reserved for audio materials. Students can work individually or in groups. This library use of taped materials has kept the cost of introducing the ESL program to a minimum.

Among features considered central to the ESL program is the individualization built into the scheduling of students into the respective courses. Anyone whose native language is other than English is required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as well as placement examinations administered by the college prior to acceptance. At registration the staff of the ESL program administers a battery of placement tests to all international students. The extent to which students may enroll in other academic disciplines is determined from the results of these pre-admission procedures. With the flexibility in scheduling ESL courses into programs of study, international

students can have a continuity of assistance in strengthening one or more of the language skills at the same time that they are progressing towards their individual academic objectives.

Acquiring English as a second language clearly does not rest exclusively on the mastery of specific skills. Important as these may be, unless the learner also experiences a positive degree of acculturation - discovering ways of relating to members of another social group, understanding something of the value system of the surrounding culture - the acquisition of that second language will be seriously deficient. The ESL program at Immaculata College has as one of its objectives that of providing foreign students the opportunity to add the dimensions of cultural awareness and understading in the transnational situation at the college. Scheduling international students into classes where they will meet and work with American students provides one concrete situation. Whether through a typing or art class, library orientation, group sports class or field trips to Capitol Hill jointly sponsored by the ESL program and American Government class students acquiring English have extensive opportunity to interact with native speakers and to come to a deeper appreciation of the cultural setting of English in the United States. The informal discussions that just happen wherever students gather or those which are integrated into course activities by inviting college leaders into a Spoken English class or arranging for a Written English class to hold a press conference with the College President provides contact situations for acquisition of the cultural dimensions of the second language. Students in the ESL program have the opportunity to enter into the mainstream of the college life, contributing the riches of their own cultural backgrounds and, in turn, being enriched by that wich surrounds them. In this exchange students experience something of the global community of today's world and that of the future.

Statistical studies of the effectiveness of the ESL program are currently in progress. In the meantime, opinionnaires completed by ESL students gave very high subjective rating to all of the course offerings. Faculty members were asked to give written comments on the impact of the program on their own classes, suggestions for improvements and observations of strengths and/or weaknesses in the program. Comments noted that ESL students seem more willing to participate in class discussion, are more aware and interested in various activities, experience less frustration in other courses and seem to have better control of language skills than international students who, in earlier years, had no opportunities, for ESL. One faculty member summarized: "One of the strengths of the ESL program is that it emphasizes the fact that Immaculata College has a unique student body; thus, rather than its being just a statistic that the international student enrollment has increased, it becomes a positive value."

In summary, the ESL program developed for a small two-year college has taken on the following identifying characteristics:

1) The ESL program is incorporated into the regular college curriculum.

2) ESL courses carry academic credit, twelve hours of which may apply to the Associate in Arts degree.

3) Distinct courses in each of the language skills are scheduled to meet the needs of beginning intermediate and advanced students.

4) Individually programmed courses of study are tailored for each international student.

5) ESL students have the opportunity to become integrated into the life of the college.

Increased language facility and cross-cultural understandings set significant conditions for the realization of a global community on a college campus. The ESL program has as one of its goals to facilitate that realization.

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